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ABSTRACT

The evolution of black studies programs from the 1960s to date is described in this radio transcript. Criticisms of early black studies programs are discussed. Changes in black studies teaching materials are mentioned. The lack of a black perspective in instructional materials is examined. Inadequate teacher preparation in minority studies is discussed as is the failure of multicultural education. In the second radio program transcript the current status of black studies programs is examined and the need to integrate black studies into the whole curriculum is stressed. The trend toward a more academically oriented program is discussed. A transcript of a university class is provided as an example of a contemporary black oriented course. Career opportunities for Afro-American studies graduates are discussed. The status of black studies programs at Yale and Berkeley are examined. Reasons for the decline of black studies are suggested, and the qualifications of black studies graduates are defended. (Author/MC)

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Options in Education
TRANSCRIPT:

Program No. 158: "BLACK STUDIES, ONE"
This transcript includes
Parts One and Two.

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BLACK STUDIES, ONE"

MAN: We hate this stinking, white racist institution. This is what black folks are talking about on the college campuses today. Teach them black studies. A man without a knowledge of himself is like a tree with no roots.

• • •

REINHARDT: Sounds of the '60s, the call for black studies.

MERROW: The demand was made on a lot of college campuses. And by 1972, there were black studies' programs in about 25% of our colleges.

REINHARDT: We say "about" because it's impossible to get an exact count.

MERROW: And if it's hard to count the number of programs, it's even harder to figure out how good the programs are.

REINHARDT: But we're going to try.

I'm Barbara Reinhardt.

MERROW: I'm John Merrow for NPR's OPTIONS IN EDUCATION.

REINHARDT: We're not talking just about college programs. Black studies are found in elementary and secondary schools too, often as a unit in social studies called "Minorities in America," or "Slavery," or "Roots."

MERROW: Or "Black Heroes."

BLACK HEROES" COURSES

TEACHER: Suppose I gave you a sweet potato. What would you do with it?

STUDENT: I would cook it.

TEACHER: All right. What would you do with it?

STUDENT: I would make a sweet potato pie.

TEACHER: All right. Today I have some riddles about what another man did with the sweet potato. Laran, will you read this riddle, and see if you can see what she's talking about

STUDENT: Mother puts it on her face and pats it just so. Then she looks pretty and is ready to go.

TEACHER: Yes?

STUDENT: Make-up.

TEACHER: It certainly is. Actually, the kind of make-up is face powder. This man that I'm talking about made make-up with a sweet potato. Laran, will you read something else?

STUDENT: I like to jump with it, and it can tie a package for the mail, or hang it onto a kite so that very high you can see them.

TEACHER: What do you think it is?

STUDENT: I think it s a rope.

TEACHER: It certainly is. And George Washington Carver made a rope with sweet potatoes. Are you ready? Would you read this one?

MERROW: Later we'll take you back to that public school in Washington, D. C.

REINHARDT: Sweet potatoes are not what people had in mind when they demanded black studies programs in the '60s.

MERROW: They wanted more than lessons about famous black Americans; they wanted courses in history, economics and nearly every other subject taught from a black perspective.

REINHARDT: Large numbers of black students were newcomers on college campuses in the '60s, and many became outraged at the absence of a black perspective.

THE EVOLUTION OF BLACK STUDIES PROGRAMS

MERROW: Meyer Wineburg of the University of Massachusetts reminds us that the black studies advocates of the 60s wanted more than educational change. They wanted to change the politics of colleges and universities.

WINEBURG: It's very, very hard for us to recall that before the 1960s the typical American college, public as well as private, had exceedingly few black students. And that was accepted as a normal, natural state of affairs, the way things are. And by the way, that was because they were kept out, not because they did not apply. The faculties were lilly-white. The first regularly tenured black professor in a white university got a job in 1942 at a school where I was, the University of Chicago, as a student. But that was no credit to the University of Chicago. The only reason Allison Davis got the job was that the Rosemall Foundation paid his salary; the University of Chicago refused to pay his salary. In the '30s when many brilliant black sociologists got their doctorates in northern universities, it was assumed they would go right to teach at Howard or Atlanta University, Morehouse, maybe, and so on.

So the whiteness of the American university, public and private alike, was a deliberate policy, both to exclude students and faculty. So the movement for black studies is not simply a curriculur movement to enrich the curriculum. It's part and parcel of saying "We're here now; take note of us; you can't keep us out as much as you used to. Our people are able. Our best people are able to teach as well as anybody else."

LOOKER: Well, now, how exactly did it happen in the mid '60s?

WINEBURG: Well, it happened very much by demonstrative actions. It became a pretty ordinary thing in the late '60s, from '67 on, any way, for black students to occupy the president's office in a university. It happened at Brandeis. It happened a little later here at U-Mass. It happened at Berkeley in '68, I believe it was.

LOOKER: What were some of the resistances of the administration and faculty at these universities to the introduction of black studies?

WINEBURG: Arguments were given that if we allow this, then every other nationality and racial group will want separate studies. For example, I remember being asked myself when I was presenting this point of view, did I favor, then, Lithuanian studies, Estonian studies, you know, Baluchistanian studies, and so on. But that's really a false argument, because when we talk about racism, we're talking about a particular group of people, or a certain number of groups in the U. S. For instance, no European group has ever suffered official racism in the United States. Only blacks, Puerto Ricans, Mexican-Americans, Indians and Asians have actually suffered from official racism.

LOOKER: By "official racism," you mean ...?

WINEBURG: I mean laws were passed specifically saying that they are to be excluded from public facilities, including schools, or that they cannot attend the same schools that all children attend. I don't mean by racism this more sort of woozy "I hate you" and so on. That's one individual to another. I'm now referring to official racism. And from that point of view, the black students, of course, had a very strong case, that since the universities had been part of the official racism, excluding them, considering the history, the racist history of American higher education, there had to be some precaution. You could not treat this area the same way you treated any other area of study.

Harvard, for example, has an area of Ukranian studies. Some rich Ukranians contributed some money. And I've seen some of the first stuff. I like the stuff they're putting out, especially their bibliography. Since I know nothing about Ukranian history, I find it helpful. They also have an Afro-American Department. If you were to compare the histories of how the Ukranian Department came into existence and how the Afro-American -- there had to be strikes and boycotts, and so on -- you know yourself that there's something special about this effort to study the black situation in American life.

REINHARDT: Meyer Wineburg of the University of Massachusetts interviewed for OPTIONS IN EDUCATION by Tom Looker.

MERROW: Struggles for black studies were very often successful. By 1972, there were at least 600 black studies programs in colleges, and there may have been as many as 1000.

REINHARDT: By program, we mean a minimum of three different courses in black studies. Some institutions began full-fledged degree granting programs where students could major in black studies and earn a bachelor's or master's degree.

CRITICISM OF BLACK STUDIES

MERROW: But well before anyone graduated with a degree in black studies the critics began to holler. There's nothing to the courses, they said; just fluff; just students sitting around rapping.

REINHARDT: Unscholarly, a kind of black group therapy, and everybody gets an A.

LUCAS: I heard of one woman, an African, who came to teach a course. I believe it was a language course. And she started giving out low grades. And that person was harassed. She received telephone calls at night. She was threatend with a lawsuit.

MERROW: Pearl Lucas was at Cornell when its black studies program began.

LUCAS: I wasn't surprised to see that it was kind of a shelter for black students where there was more propaganda than education taking place. Superficiality was invited. It seemed to me a further extension of what happens to minority people in education from pre-school, and now, as it turns out, straight through -- right on through the college and university level where....

REINHARDT: What's that?

LUCAS: ...people who were not qualified were brought in to teach the students. They were given titles just as the other faculty at the university had, but they were unearned titles.

Now I've seen recently where a weather forecaster at one of our major communication networks was fired for falsifying his credentials. But it is just the sort of fakery that the universities have perpetrated.

REINHARDT: Now where these good teachers?

LUCAS: Well, I must confess. I think I only sat in on a class once. However, I did speak to a young lady from Africa who was taking courses there, or at least one course. She told me that she was personally familiar with an incident, a political incident that had happened in her country in Africa that was discussed in one of her classes there. She said it was completely distorted, that the person in front of the class was simply preaching propaganda, and that was it. And she had strongly objected to it.

REINHARDT: Isn't what was offered, then, what some of the black students really wanted? They were angry. They didn't want to study books on black history or literature; they wanted to get in touch with their blackness.

LUCAS: I would say that they were more mixed-up than anything else. Surely they were angry, because if they came to a place for which they were totally unprepared, a highly competitive institution, with none of the necessary -- well, this certainly happened at the undergraduate level, and there were many undergraduate students in this black studies center; a few graduate students, but perhaps mostly undergraduates. They were not prepared. They were being failed in any legitimate course, course or courses, in many of the legitimate courses. For the most part, these students were brought to the colleges and universities unprepared for this jump that they were making from minority high schools, poorly prepared there, and then suddenly set down in highly competitive institutions. And instead of being given the necessary skills to be able to compete, they were actually discouraged from bringing out the best in themselves.

MERROW: Pearl Lucas, a former administrator at Cornell University in New York. She says she was fired because she opposed the way the black studies program was set up. The University, however, denies that her firing had anything to do with her stand on black studies.

REINHARDT: Pearl Lucas is right about unprepared students. But the truth is colleges were also unprepared.

CHANGES IN BLACK STUDIES' TEACHING MATERIALS

MERROW: So were the people who design curricula and write textbooks. In New York, Len Martelli told us how McGraw-Hill responded to the first demands for material about blacks.

MARTELLI: Now this is a series that McGraw-Hill published. It's a series of short novels about the lives and concerns of young people. Well, you can see from the title here -- "The Sniper" and "The Heist," and this sort of thing. And here's an illustration of a looted radio and TV store. You see, this might have been the sort of thing that people wanted to see and actually have kids reading about in the '60s. But I just can't imagine this in a school now; I mean anywhere. You know what I'm getting at? People don't want to see this sort of thing any more, neither, from what we can gather, blacks nor whites. But any way, this was the sort of thing, in other words, that was supposed to get down to the very, you know, hard core, well I guess, ghetto scene.

But what we find now is that people are not interested in separating out groups any more. Nor are they thinking that we're doing their children a service by putting in a regional dialect or bad English, or whatever else, you know. So that now the thrust of everything that we get is for people, when you pick up a book -- that everybody should be there naturally.

STUCKEY: So it seems to have been integrated, then, is what you're saying into the regular textbooks. Can you point to some examples of that?

MARTELLI: Oh, sure. For example, this is a book from a new series that McGraw-Hill just did. It's the McGraw-Hill Social Studies. You know, this is

the first book that the kids are going to pick up. It's the first grade. And you have here a redhead, a little redheaded girl, a little black boy and a little white boy. But then when you get into the book and you start turning the pages, you discover that on almost every page there there're four, five or six pictures that you're going to see minority groups. On pages 10 and 11, you see there is a black boy. On page 13 is a black girl and an Oriental boy. It continues like that. In other words, this is what we've done throughout every series. You'll find the same thing in the modern history books, you know. It's just like it's normal now, you see. You'll find it in all our textbooks that way.

MERROW: Len Martelli of McGraw-Hill.

THE LACK OF A BLACK PERSPECTIVE IN INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS

REINHARDT: But maybe even with revisions, the McGraw-Hill books are not adequate for teaching black history.

MERROW: It's the job of Ken Komoski to look over new classroom materials and decide how useful they are to teachers. Komoski things the books on black studies come up short.

KOMOSKI: There are views on the part of the black community that have certainly never been reflected in American textbooks, that are still not there in any of the textbooks that are heavily used in this country. And that's something that you've got to recognize; that the majority of youngsters and the majority of schools in this country are using a minority, a miniscule number of texts among all of those that are published. The large publishers with the large advertising budgets and the large sales forces tend to make the large sales. They wouldn't be where they are if they didn't. So the books that exist that one might say, oh, they are different; they are revisionist in the sense that they are telling and re-telling the black story the way many blacks feel it ought to be told: those materials are not being used broadly in the schools.

MERROW: Ken Komoski of Education Products Information Exchange in New York City.

STUDENT: Artie's mother is a babysitter. His father is a carpenter.

TEACHER: A carpenter is a person who works with....?

STUDENT: Wood.

TEACHER: Class?

CLASS: Wood.

TEACHER: Wood. Very good.

REINHARDT: Publishers and reviewers all have ideas about how to write the best textbook for black studies. But ironically, in the classes we visited, teachers use no text at all. They improvised.

TEACHER: They're talking about black parents in our community as we make history every day. I've told the boys and girls that we make history daily, and their parents make history.

All right. Who could talk about Kevin's father. Would you read for us, Kevin?

STUDENT: Kevin's father is a painter. Mr. Thomas and his family went to the White House because he helped to paint the White House.

TEACHER: Very good. All right. Read about Moise's mother. Tanesha?

STUDENT: Moise's mother is a -- Moise's mother is a secretary for the U. S....

TEACHER: United States.

STUDENT: ...United States Attorney's Office.

TEACHER: Very good. All right. And Kendall's mother. Kendall, do you want to read about your mother?

STUDENT: Kendall's mother is a pre-school teecher.

TEACHER: Very good. I forgot to put "teacher." All right. Kendall's mother is a pre-school teacher. Talking about teacher, what is the name of the famous black educator who started a school in Florida with one cent? Raise your hand and tell me? What is the name of that black educator?

STUDENT: Mary McLeod Bethune.

TEACHER: Bethune. Very good.

MERROW: We don't know how good a job that teacher does with or without a text. Generally, most teachers don't know enough to teach about blacks, let alone teach from a black perspective.

INADEQUATE TEACHER PREPARATION IN MINORITY STUDIES

REINHARDT: When black studies courses are offered to prospective teachers in college, hardly anyone signs up. That's what Dwayne Cambell, a professor in California, says.

CAMBELL: On this campus, as a result of my nagging for six years that the social studies teachers were not being properly prepared, the history department put together a course designed to deal specifically with the history of ethnic minorities in California. So that would be all ethnic minorities taken care of in one semester. And they offered that course for the first time this semester, and only four students chose to take the course. To me that is incredible, since for years I've been advising students to take those courses. And even the most liberal white student, when we get into a class and discuss it says, well, yes, I'd really like to take such a course, but it hasn't been offered. And now when it gets offered, there's nobody in the classroom.

BALTEZORE: Why aren't they taking them? What are the students telling you?

CAMBELL: They're telling -- they say they're busy with all their other requirements. And so they're taking courses in any number of things. I mean you could take a course here in the history of air power, and you'd have more students in it than the history of black Americans, more students or people who are going to be teachers in our public schools. Or any one of a number of what I would consider rather esoteric, very small subdivisions of history will get more students in it than will a course that is trying to undo the incredible lack of black history in the schools.

REINHARDT: Dwayne Cambell, a professor of education at California State University in Sacramento. He was interviewed for OPTIONS IN EDUCATION by Jay Baltezore.

MERROW: He sounds pessimistic: the next generation of teachers doesn't care very much.

AN INSUFFICIENT FOCUS ON THE BLACK EXPERIENCE

REINHARDT: And if Joseph Russell of Indiana University is right, the kids in public school, black and white, aren't learning much right now.

MERROW: Russell is head of the National Council for Black Studies. We asked him what a high school student today is likely to learn about blacks in American history.

RUSSELL: Probably what you will learn about blacks in school is a kind of biographical history of very important [people]. You'll learn something about the Booker T. Washingtons, W. E. B. Du Bois, Martin Luther King, and perhaps Muhammed Ali. But I don't think you'll get into the substantive issues of Afro-American literature or Afro-American history from the vantage point of its implication for the present, as well as future policy developments and legislation, and that kind of thing.

REINHARDT: Or talk of racism?

RUSSELL: Well, I think that what you hear about racism is going to be certainly minimized. It is not going to reflect itself in terms of impediments to employment, housing, education and all those things that mean life and existence or the pursuit of happiness for black people.

REINHARDT: Well, now, you think that all the kids in the nation at some point between kindergarten and 12th grade should be required to take a course in Afro-American studies. But I expect that a lot of other minorities would feel the same. That is, there'd probably be lots of Jewish people who would like to have a course in Jewish studies required and women who'd like to have women studies, and native Americans. Where do we draw the line?

RUSSELL: Well, one of the things that the National Council for Black Studies has proposed is that we developed, and we now have a syllabus for the same, a course called U. S. Ethnic Minorities. It's a general course that would give a kind of general introduction to America's ethnic minorities, with a view toward at least acquainting all students with these diverse groups and permitting them, then, the opportunity to elect, if you will, a concentration. If one is more interested in the Latino community or the American Indian or blacks, they may then go forth and concentrate in those areas.

MERROW: Joseph Russell of the National Council for Black Studies.

MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION: DILUTING ETHNIC STUDIES

The study of many cultures has become institutionalized. It's even got a label -- multicultural education, meaning not just black studies, but also courses about Jews, Poles, Chinese, Chicanos.

REINHARDT: Meyer Wineburg, the University of Masschusetts' historian, thinks that multicultural education doesn't teach kids anything substantial about ethnic minorities. It trivializes them.

WINEBURG: Multiculturalism is being used in many schools -- I'm speaking about elementary and high schools, and in colleges too -- as a substitute for dealing with racism. In other words, there has been a substitution of cultural peculiarities for racism. So the child comes out of such a course with what kind of understanding? Namely, that some people have this kind of food, another group of people have another kind of food, cultural pecualiarities. They have dances of their own, language of their own, all the cultural apparatus. And so America's nothing but one great plurality of cultures. And of course it is. But the historic fact is that it's a very graded kind of -- a subordinate and superordinate kind of system. And that feature of it is left out of multiculturalism.

If you're talking about studying the culture of various groups in the U. S., it is as legitimate to study Ukranians as it is to study blacks,

from a cultural point of view. There s no group that has more dignity than any other group. There's no group that has any more right to equality than any other group, except those groups that have been subjected to racism, official racism especially.

LOOKER: Which is the blacks and Asians....

WINEBURG: Yes. The blacks, Asians and Hispanics, for the most part. To deal with multiculturalism without dealing with racism to me is indefensible.

REINHARDT: Meyer Wineburg of the University of Massachusetts talking with Tom Looker.

MERROW: He criticizes the inoffensive curriculum. But it may be that most of what passes for black studies in our public schools is, by and large, inoffensive.

REINHARDT: Biographies of famous blacks, with little or no racism or slavery.

MERROW: But before we get too critical, that is a step foward. A lot of students still go through twelve years of school without ever hearing the names W. E. B. Du Bois or Mary McLeod Bethune.

MAN: I was always disappointed that we wouldn't spend a day on slavery or a day, for example, in West Virginia history on blacks, although that was a chapter of the book. We would spend five minutes at the end of a sixty minute period, and that was it. And I was always left with an empty taste in my mouth because of that.

But I do remember something. When I was in 8th grade -- 8th grade, it must have been 1963 -- '62 '63. And there was one of these experimental textbooks which had black people integrated. I remember I loved new books. I loved the smell of new books. I used to leaf through them at the beginning. And I had just opened the book and it fell on this page. And it was a picture of W. E. B. Du Bois, a famous picture that was taken on his 70th birthday, I think. And he was sitting there with a three-piece suit. And it said that this man who obviously didn't look white was a black person and had been a great race leader. And almost from that moment I aspired to be as close as I could to the image of Du Bois.

* * *

REINHARDT: You might like the complete transcript of this two-part report on black studies. Well, it's available for one dollar fro· National Public Radio -- Education, Washington, D. C. 20036.

MERROW: The cassette recording is available also for five dollars.

REINHARDT: And we have a program schedule free.

MERROW: The transcript of the two-part series, one dollars; a cassette, five dollars. The program guide is free.

REINHARDT: The address again: National Public Radio -- Education, Washington D. C., 20036.

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I'm Barbara Reinhardt.

MERROW: I'm John Merrow.

* * *

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YOUNGSTER: We use it in bread and waffles and cake. Without it none of these can we make.

TEACHER: What do you think?

YOUNSTER: I think it's flour.

TEACHER: It certainly is flour. And George Washington Carver made flour from a sweet potato.

BLACK STUDIES AT A STANDSTILL?

CHENNAULLT: Black studies has lost its popularity. It is no longer popular culture as it was during the '60s. I'm not sure that's good. I'm not sure it's bad. But it seems that we're right back at a standstill again. You know, I wonder if the efforts of those during the '60s are now in vain, in a sense.

REINHARDT: Is black studies at a standstill? Steven Chennault of the Detroit public schools thinks so.

I'm Barbara Reinhardt.

MERROW: I'm John Merrow. And on OPTIONS IN EDUCATION, we're continuing our report on black studies in grade schools and colleges.

REINHARDT: There are 328 black studies programs on college campuses today, according to a count made by a Pennsylvania professor. Seven years ago there were at least twice as many. But seven years ago, people were angry. The demands of the '60s had not died away.

MERROW: Today lots of public schools devote class time to learning about black Americans. But back in the turbulent '60s the demonstrators wanted more.

REINHARDT: Students wanted whole courses, not short units. They wanted full-scale academic departments, black studies' department. Often they got them.

MERROW: But some people think that what they got did them more harm than good.

A CRITICAL VIEW OF BLACK STUDIES PROGRAMS

KILSON: Thousands of black kids have had the quality of their education distorted and have been misled and are now in the job market with fewer of the really hard type of skills, either as social analysts or whatever other kinds of skills that they might have gotten had they not been sidetracked by the catharsis, the pie-in-the-sky aspects of the black studies movement.

REINHARDT: Martin Kilson, professor of government at Harvard.

KILSON: To isolate a curriculum from the community as a whole, college community as a whole, is, in the long run, to cut off your nose to spite your face. It gives you a short-run sense of catharsis, of having put something over on the honkies; "we have our thing," etcetera, etcetera. There was a certain kind of elan associated with that process of wrenching something for the first time on white campuses and in the whole infrastructure of American education from the honkies, from the whiteys, and all the other kind of ritualistic, symbolic terms that were used in the late '60s and early '70s as this process of establishing black studies took place.

But at some point one must grow up and recognize that there is a sensible way and a nonsensible way. And I have argued that the sensible way was to allow black studies to find its way into the larger curriculum context, into the sociology department, in the economics department, into the political sciences department, into literature departments, into the humanities division. In that way, black studies will ultimately be used to serve the needs of the community as a whole and to help white Americans who God knows, need help to learn something about the place of blacks and the evil imposed upon blacks for a couple of hundred years in a racist society. Blacks have felt that they wanted to have control, directly, immediately, over that process and didn't want to entrust it to a cooperative situation with white students and with white administrators, with white faculties. Ergo the racially exclusive, indeed racially segregated and almost black racist oriented black studies, anti-white black studies departments, or Afro-American studies departments, or Africana studies departments that we have had over the last ten or eleven years.

You know, we can call the black studies movement of the '60s and the '70s a particular stage of getting blackness recognized by a university curriculum, administrators and the like. But that stage is over.

MERROW: Martin Kilson of Harvard. He was interviewed for OPTIONS IN EDUCATION by Henrietta Davis of WGBH.

A CHANGING PERSPECTIVE AMONG BLACK STUDENTS

REINHARDT: One of top rated black studies programs, one that does emphasize studies, not blackness, is found at Yale University. Yale says that its students in black studies today are academically oriented.

GATES: I came to Yale in 1969 as an undergraduate. And since then I have seen that the students who at least come to Yale are much more rigorous academically than the students were ten years ago. I mean people want to be taught; but they want a marketable skill. They want to learn to be an economist. They want to learn to be an historian. They're not interested in feel-good courses.

REINHARDT: Yes. But that's not what they were saying back in the late '60s.

GATES: No, but this is the late '70s. No, it's not what they were saying. But I don't think that students should have a right to define the nature of their education any way, precisely because the trends do change and people feel differently. Ten years is not a hell of a long time in the history of education. But it is a long time in the history of black studies. And we have to look for precedents which extend much beyond ourselves in order to establish firm foundations for our educational system.

REINHARDT: H. L. Gates, Director of Undergraduate Studies in Yale's Afro-American Studies program. He claims students of the '70s are different from their counterparts in the '60s.

MERROW: But that's not all that has changed. Black studies teachers are more qualified. Ten years ago, some schools hired teachers whose most significant qualifications were a dashiki, an Afro and a loud voice.

STEPTO: I think there're more important issues than harping on those situation where you found people who might not have finished a degree or situations where, you know, you had a notoriously bad course, or something like that.

REINHARDT: Or where the department for the first few years did not admit whites, either as students or as faculty members.

STEPTO: Well, I guess that is an issue. Certainly it is a historical

issue. And there were some awful things that came from that. But again, I don't feel that that's a substantial matter now in terms of the whole academic enterprise of Afro-American studies.

REINHARDT: Well, then, let's look at it today. The courses, the programs that have lasted, generally speaking, are academically very strong. And there isn't this whole urgency, this rage. And the courses don't really purport to change the society, or that kind of thing. Now aren't we missing something?

STEPTO: Yes. We have probably fewer and fewer courses that would fall in that category of current event courses or something, or the super-relevant course, you know. But I think that in the programs that have lasted you find find strong disciplinary and inter-disciplinary study. You find people as interested in being good historians as they are in being good Afro-Americanists.

AN EXAMPLE OF A CONTEMPORARY BLACK-ORIENTED COURSE

PROFESSOR: What we're going to talk about in terms of the rule of blues, what's going to be our deciding factor, will not be any of these things which can change and aren't necessarily kind of fool-proof. But we're going to look at the harmony. And we're going to look at the harmonic structure of the blues and we're going to see that this is where jazz gets its kind of basis. And we're going to talk about some chords and how they are used in a kind of a particular way that's going to make for standard notion of what we're going to have in terms of rural blues. Okay?

We're going to have some kind of one chord. And I'll explain these in a second. We're going to have some kind of four chord going on, and we're also going to have some kind of five chord going on in a particular kind of order, okay?, of one, of four and of five. If you remember what we've been doing with solfege, we have -- what? -- do. And what's the fourth degree?

STUDENT: Fa.

PROFESSOR: Fa. And sol. Okay. And what we're going to do is, by actually doing it, we're going to see if we can develop some kind of sense of ear for what's going on harmonically with the blues. Now we need a volunteer. And remember what I said, it's the person that moves the most. See, I saw you. Why don't you come on up? The person that moves the most is always the person that gets kind of mad. Well, please.

Now, what we want you to do is you're going to be not kind of not a guinea pig, but kind of our leader, in a sense, in this activity. And we're going to think about the things that we talked about last week in terms of what this music is and what it does. And what it does is it presents a case, right? I mean usually something is being said, right? And usually the guy repeats himself -- what? -- for emphasis, right?, not simply because he doesn't have anything else to say. And at the top of the chorus, just before we come back to one, or when we're at the fifth scale degree, we hear some kind of resolution. Right? In other words, if you lost your baby and you lost your baby, by the time you get to the top of the chorus, something is going to happen to kind of hold that or change that situation for you. Okay.

Now we want you to think of something that's personal to you that you can share with all of us. Okay? And we just want you to kind of sing along. Now you aren't being graded, of course, on your voice. But we want you to just try to be true to the tradition. That means you can kind of weave in and out rhythmically. And I will kind of -- I will be your harmonica or your guitar. Okay? So since you'll be the emphasis, you'll be the one. Okay. We're going to give him a -- do you have a theme?

Think of just anything. It doesn't matter.

STUDENT: Being here.

PROFESSOR: Okay. The Being Here Blues. What's your first name again?

STUDENT: Wendell.

PROFESSOR: Wendell Being Here Blues. Okay? And let's pick it up a little bit. One, two, three, four.

* * *

PROFESSOR: Okay. That was -- that was absolutely wonderful. I mean it was kind of -- kind of very close to his experience -- right? -- which is kind of a sense of it being the blues. It was something in the sense that you all identified with, though, because you understood what he was feeling. I mean he was kind of up here in front of all of you and he didn't want to be here. And all of these things are -- what? -- part of what we see as being essential to the notion of what? The blues, right? Now that was wonderful, Wendell. But I think we can go just a little bit farther with it. And so I need one more person who's going to be accompanied now by the class singing the blues.

AFRO-AMERICAN STUDIES STUDENT ASSESSES CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

REINHARDT: You are a graduate student in the first year of Yale's master's degree program in Afro-American studies. Your major, really, is music. That's where you'll be doing your thing. Why -- what kind of job can you expect to get with a graduate degree in Afro-American studies?

STUDENT: Well, first of all, there're five of us in the program, an interdisciplinary program. And several of us will be going on for a Ph. D. The master's is not a terminal degree, okay? So once you start talking about a Ph. D. then, you have the university at your disposal for teaching. Two of the people in our program are actors. And they have had considerable experience before coming to Yale. And one of the girls is going on for a Ph. D.; the other is thinking about some other types of programs. But again, none of us are using the master's as a terminal degree.

The school that I went to, the undergraduate school, was the University of Connecticut, where there were no undergraduate courses virtually, except course in Afro-American history.

REINHARDT: Well, why not -- instead of separating those kinds of things, why not just integrate them in the regular courses, in music, in history, in art, literature?

STUDENT: I think that's the ideal situation, okay? But me being a music major, for example, I had no Afro-American music at the undergraduate level whatsoever. The only exposure I had to it was simply on my own. In the music history courses, we simply had European music history, period. Even the contemporary music just virtually ignored black composers, okay, even black classical composers. And ideally, yes, they should be integrated, but they're not.

MERROW: A student in a class on jazz, part of Yale's Afro-American studies program.

TRANSPOSING THE ACTIVISM OF THE '60s TO THE CLASSROOM

REINHARDT: Another program with a reputation for excellence is found at the University of California at Berkeley. There, too, the black studies movement has changed character, from revolutionary to academic.

MERROW: In fact, at Berkeley, where students protested the loudest in the late '60s, they now study those events in history classes.

REINHARDT: According to William Banks, department chairman at Berkeley, that's exactly where the fervor of the '60s belongs -- in the curriculum.

BANKS: We can spend all our time helping people get a sense of identity, so forth and so on. But we took the position that that's a short-term solution. And as the other institutions in society change, as there're changes in society across the land, in the black community and families, and so forth, that whole process of identity formation can take place elsewhere. So we can get be about the business of providing students with knowledge and information that they can use to improve their lives and the lives of the society.

REINHARDT: William Banks, chairman of the Afro-American Studies Department at Berkeley, interviewed for OPTIONS IN EDUCATION by Jay Baltezore.

INSTITUTIONAL NEGLECT OF BLACK STUDIES PROGRAMS

MERROW: Yale and Berkeley have two of the best black studies programs, we're told.

REINHARDT: But what about the rest?

WINEBURG: The fact is that black studies today in American universities, in most universities, are sort of secondhand departments. They do not get much money. They have very few tenured full professors. They get very little research money. There's little reason to expect that most of them will be in existence, let's say, fifteen, twenty years from now.

REINHARDT: Meyer Wineburg is a professor of education at the University of Massachusetts. He's editor of the bi-weekly publication, "Integrated Education. And for years he's been watching the ebb and flow of academic programs about blacks.

WINEBURG: The institutions acted in the first place only when they were under pressure. That was the only reason, in most cases, that they opened the doors after Martin Luther King-- in '68 after Dr. King was assassinated. I remember in Chicago, there were numerous meetings of college presidents and representatives. I was in on some of them. And they said "We've got to do something." That was the way they put it. But they did very little in the end. And as soon as the urgency was gone, they got out of it. They settled for so little that there isn't much to those programs, to many of those programs.

LOOKER: Was it something in the way the programs were originally set up that was bogus, or was it....?

WINEBURG: No. If there was a weakness in the way they were set up, then they could have been strengthened. The appropriate response to weakness is not to abandon it, but to strengthen it. But you have very little of that going on today.

LOOKER: Well, now, what is it? Have the students changed? Are they less political, or what?

WINEBURG: Well, yes. Black students are more or less like white students. If you go to Berkeley, for example, now and examine the Afro-American Department, it would probably -- it probably pleases many old line white academics, because now it's on a much more established basis: graduate study; the people who are chosen for the faculty have to go through the usual rigamarole of committees and so on. And there's much less of a political interest on the part of the students in those programs. And so they're more acceptable. The more they become like other, the rest of the university, the more acceptable they are, course.

LOOKER: Well, do you feel that, for example, at a place like Berkeley,

the black studies courses have improved over the years? I mean, I guess some people argue that there's been a kind of shakedown, and the black studies programs that weren't academically sound weren't teaching the kids things that they could use when they left the university have fallen by the wayside, and the programs that have survived are the ones that have proven to be academically sound, and so forth. Would you agree with that or disagree with that?

WINEBURG: No, I disagree with that. First of all, we ought to have a little heart. When you start any new movement -- I've been teaching for over thirty years. I've seen fads come and go, in black studies too. It was a new thing. I guess the, sat around like teachers do, and someone asked somebody else "Have you got an idea? What shall we do?" And the other guy scratched his head and said "Damned if I know." And so let's try this you know, and let's try that. So a lot of stuff got in, I think, that way. It was experimental, sort of trying out, and it turned out to be insubstantial, and it dropped -- it was dropped. That sort of thing: I think there's so little of that now. That has sha n down. It's not -- I want to insist that that's not a black thing. It primarily arose out of the novelty of the whole effort.

LOOKER: A fadlike quality here.

WINEBURG: Yes, right. What I'm objecting to is if the Afro-American studies structures cease fighting racism on the campus, then they cease, to that degree, in being justified. If you take the racism out, or the anti-racism out, what you've got left is all right you know. You have black hi ory left, and so on. But you've taken the heart out of it. You've se d let's talk about black people as though they were simply black people like white people and have not faced up to this peculiar catastrophe -- racism.

If the black organization on campus doesn't fight racism, who is going to do it?

REINHARDT: Meyer Wineburg of the University of Massacshusetts talking with Tom Looker.

MERROW: He misses the old pizzazz, the revolutionary fervor.

REASONS FOR THE DECLI F OF BLACK STUDIES

REINHARDT: Something else might be missing from black studies too: students.

LESTER: Our experience on this campus has been that black students quite frequently do not take courses at least from me and I think from others in this department because, they say, we're too demanding, you know. I mean one black student in one of my courses came to me once and said "Why aren't there more black kids in your classes?" And I said, you know, "Terrell, you move among the students; you find out and tell me."

Two or three months later he came back and he said "I did a little survey, and they all say that you're too rough, you know, that you demand too much and you grade too hard." And I said, well, you know, I'm sorry.

REINHARDT: Another University of Massachusetts professor, Julius Lester. He's heard from students that his courses are too hard. The faculty at U-Mass tells him something different.

LESTER: I think that the attitude, generally nationally, I've found among the white faculty is that they really have a very patronizing attitude toward black studies. They don't see. You know their feeling is, well, okay,

we'll start putting in The Invisible Man and a book by James Baldwin in the English courses, you know; and we'll put in a book on slavery in the history courses, and we've taken care of black studies, you know, which is simply not my view of black studies at all, of being just a totally kind of perspective that even uses different kinds of tools and ways of teaching, and what have you. They aren't open to that at all.

LOOKER: It was this attitude that precipitated the anger and the political action that got black studies in in the late '60s. Why hasn't that anger been continued?

LESTER: That, to me, is simply political reality. We're outnumbered. They control the bucks. You know, this is a state university. The black population of Massachusetts is 3%. So you know, hey, we're in trouble right? So we don't have the numbers. So that, you know, if it starts to happen, we can fight against it. But that doesn't mean that we'll succeed, because they've got the numbers.

REINHARDT: Julius Lester of the University of Massachusetts.

Maybe black students are going elsewhere, say into accounting, so that they can get jobs. But so are white students.

PROFESSOR DEFENDS QUALIFICATIONS OF BLACK STUDIES GRADUATES

MERROW: Charles Davis says students enrolled in black studies at Yale are no less qualified than any other liberal arts major.

DAVIS: Well I suppose the first answer to such a question, "What do you do with a degree in Afro-American Studies?," is what do you do with any degree in liberal arts, since it's not a degree that anyone can do anything with. My own answer, based on my own observation, is that those people coming through an Afro-American studies tend to have a little edge, because they have a particular kind of knowledge of experience that most people don't. And so we haven't had in any way problems about a future for our graduates in Afro-American studies.

REINHARDT: You know, I'm sure that there are critics of Afro-American studies who say we shouldn't be teaching our black students to teach black studies; we should be teaching them to teach black kids how to read.

DAVIS: That, of course, is very true. Reading is a problem. But you don't do just one thing. It s very important to build up reading and writing skills, and that we ought to develop people with proficiency in these areas.

May I say this is not a peculiarly black phenomenon? It's a general phenomenon, this incompetence in reading and writing skills. It's a national disgrace. And it seems to me it has nothing to do actually with whether or not we should teach black studies or Afro-American studies, or whether or not we should teach history or English or economics or psychology, or any of these areas. It's a totally irrelevant question in this respect. It's a very strong need that has to be met more intelligently, more imaginatively and more directly. We are trying to do something about that at Yale. It has nothing to do with the kind of study and the kind of work that can occur in a specialized area like Afro-American studies. And I refuse to accept that question as a serious one.

REINHARDT: Yale's Charles Davis. I meant the question seriously. It only because a lot of students and teachers are still asking it.

MERROW: It would be an unhappy irony if after surviving the years of criticism, if after getting rid of the dubious courses, if after all that black studies programs were to dwindle because of economic pressures, because

a degree in black studies does not lead to a job.

TEACHER: Will you give me any word, any two words, rather, that you think will describe George Washington Carver. He was a....? He was a what?

YOUNGSTER: He was a famous man.

TEACHER: Good. Can you think of two words?

YOUNGSTER: A great man.

TEACHER: Another one.

YOUNGSTER: He was a peaceful man.

TEACHER: He certainly was. Can you think of another one?

YOUNGSTER: He was a doctor's son.

TEACHER: He was that, too, because he was a doctor, yes.

YOUNGSTER: He was a famous man.

TEACHER: Yes. Now let's take some of those that you gave us and use the two words "famous".....

* * *

REINHARDT: You might like the complete transcript of this two-part report on black studies. Well, it's available for one dollar from National Public Radio -- Education, Washington, D. C., 20036.

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I'm Barbara Reinhardt.

MERROW: I'm John Merrow, and this is NPR, National Public Radio.

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